Prayer: An Invitation from God—Week 1

Truth

Communication is an important part of any growing relationship, including our relationship with God. God the Father invites us to draw near to Him in prayer. "The first thing we must learn about prayer is that God wants fellowship with us and that He is drawing us to Himself" (John White, *The Fight*, 23). Prayer is simply talking with God your Father.

An Invitation from God

"Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you." James 4:8

John Calvin remarks concerning James 4:8, "He again reminds us that the aid of God will not be wanting to us, provided we give place to him. For when he bids us to draw nigh to God, that we may know him to be near to us he intimates that we are destitute of his grace, because we withdraw from him. But as God stands on our side, there is no reason to fear succumbing. But if any one concludes from this passage, that the first part of the work belongs to us, and that afterwards the grace of God follows, the Apostle meant no such thing; for though we ought to do this, yet it does immediately follow that we can. And the Spirit of God, in exhorting us to our duty, derogates nothing from himself, or from his own power; but the very thing he bids us to do, he himself fulfills in us" (*Calvin's Commentaries*, Vol 22, 334).

Read the following verses and circle or underline ways in which God is inviting us to pray to Him.

Psalm 5:1-3 "Listen to my words, LORD, consider my lament. Hear my cry for help, my King and my God, for to you I pray. In the morning, LORD, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait expectantly." (NIV)

Isaiah 55:6 "Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near"

Jeremiah 29:12-14 "Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you, declares the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile."

Jeremiah 33:3 "Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known."

The Promise of Prayer

What do these verses promise us as children of God concerning prayer? What are the conditions to these promises?

John 14:13-14 “Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.”

James 1:5-6 “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. [6] But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.”

1 John 1:9 “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

1 John 5:14 “And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us.

Our Confidence in Prayer

Hebrews 4:14-16 Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Hebrews 10:22 (Read 10:19-25 for context) “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”

Where do we find our confidence in approaching a holy and omnipotent God from this passage?

Devotion to Prayer

Colossians 4:2 *“Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.”*

Devote yourselves to prayer: The word ‘*devote*’ can be translated “to busy oneself with or be engaged in.” It denotes a certain persistence and determination in prayer, with a resolution not to give up.

John Calvin's 4 Rules of Prayer from Joel Beeke Feb 05, 2016

https://www.monergism.com/content/john-calvins-4-rules-prayer

For John Calvin, prayer cannot be accomplished without discipline. He writes, "Unless we fix certain hours in the day for prayer, it easily slips from our memory." He goes on to prescribe several rules to guide believers in offering effectual, fervent prayer.

1. The first rule is *a heartfelt sense of reverence.*

In prayer, we must be "disposed in mind and heart as befits those who enter conversation with God." Our prayers should arise from "the bottom of our heart." Calvin calls for a disciplined mind and heart, asserting that "the only persons who duly and properly gird themselves to pray are those who are so moved by God's majesty that, freed from earthly cares and affections, they come to it."

2. The second rule is *a heartfelt sense of need and repentance.*

We must "pray from a sincere sense of want and with penitence," maintaining "the disposition of a beggar." Calvin does not mean that believers should pray for every whim that arises in their hearts, but that they must pray penitently in accord with God's will, keeping His glory in focus, yearning for every request "with sincere affection of heart, and at the same time desiring to obtain it from him."

3. The third rule is *a heartfelt sense of humility and trust in God.*

True prayer requires that "we yield all confidence in ourselves and humbly plead for pardon," trusting in God's mercy alone for blessings both spiritual and temporal, always remembering that the smallest drop of faith is more powerful than unbelief. Any other approach to God will only promote pride, which will be lethal: "If we claim for ourselves anything, even the least bit," we will be in grave danger of destroying ourselves in God's presence.

4. The final rule is to have *a heartfelt sense of confident hope.*

The confidence that our prayers will be answered does not arise from ourselves, but through the Holy Spirit working in us. In believers' lives, faith and hope conquer fear so that we are able to "ask in faith, nothing wavering" (James 1:6, KJV). This means that true prayer is confident of success, owing to Christ and the covenant, "for the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ seals the pact which God has concluded with us." Believers thus approach God boldly and cheerfully because such "confidence is necessary in true invocation… which becomes the key that opens to us the gate of the kingdom of heaven."

Overwhelming? Unattainable?

These rules may seem overwhelming—even unattainable—in the face of a holy, omniscient God. Calvin acknowledges that our prayers are fraught with weakness and failure. "No one has ever carried this out with the uprightness that was due," he writes. But God tolerates "even our stammering and pardons our ignorance," allowing us to gain familiarity with Him in prayer, though it be in "a babbling manner."

In short, we will never feel like worthy petitioners. Our checkered prayer life is often attacked by doubts, but such struggles show us our ongoing need for prayer itself as a “lifting up of the spirit” and continually drive us to Jesus Christ, who alone will “change the throne of dreadful glory into the throne of grace.” Calvin concludes that “Christ is the only way, and the one access, by which it is granted us to come to God.”

An excerpt from Joel Beeke’s contribution in *John Calvin: A Heart for Devotion, Doctrine, and Doxology*.

Equipping

How do you respond to God's invitation to prayer discussed in this lesson?

This is not to cause you guilt, but provide an opportunity for personal evaluation. How would you rate your "devotion" to prayer (praise, thanksgiving, confession, intercession and supplication)?

	Weak			Strong	
Praise	1	2	3	4	5
Thanksgiving	1	2	3	4	5
Confession	1	2	3	4	5
Intercession (for others)	1	2	3	4	5
Supplication (for yourself)	1	2	3	4	5

What are some practical ways in which you can strengthen your devotion to prayer?

Respond to the following quote by Timothy Keller on the centrality of prayer.

"The Bible is all about God, and that is why the practice of prayer is so pervasive throughout its pages. The greatness of prayer is nothing but an extension of the greatness and glory of God in our lives" (*Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God*, 26).

Accountability

Share the results of your self-evaluation of your devotion to prayer. Where do you see success/growth in your prayer life? What are barriers to your prayer life?

What action points will you commit to in order to strengthen your prayer life in the next month?

Mission

How can the truths in this lesson fuel your intercession for those on your prayer-tags?

Supplication

Share your prayer requests with one another. Space is provided below to write them down. Use this to help remind you what to pray for each other during the week.
In addition there are a few questions to help you share requests.

What are your prayer requests regarding the truth this week?

In light of the discussion this week what do you need to pray for?

What are your prayer requests regarding any situations in your life this week?

Prayer requests from others in the group this week

<u>Praying for One Another—Week 2</u>

Truth

"Praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints" (Eph 6:18).

"How important is prayer? Paul lets us know by repeating the word 'all' four times in this passage, as if to say that there is nothing that cannot be prayed for and that there is no situation in which prayer is unavailing. He says that we should pray 'on *all* occasions,' 'with *all* kinds of prayer and requests,' '*al*ways,' and finally, 'for *all* the saints.' It is a helpful and comprehensive outline" (James Boice, on Ephesians 6:18).

List examples for each of these outline points:

At All Times (all occasions):

With All Prayer and Supplication (all kinds of prayer):

All Perseverance:

For All the Saints:

1 Samuel 12:23 "Moreover, as for me, far be it from me **that I should sin against the LORD <u>by ceasing to pray for you</u>**, and I will instruct you in the good and the right way."

John Calvin (1509-1564) is widely attributed as the source of this statement on prayer.

> "Our prayer must not be self-centered. It must arise not only because we feel our own need as a burden we must lay upon God, but also because we are so bound up in love for our fellow men that we feel their need as acutely as our own. **To make intercession for men is the <u>most powerful</u> and <u>practical</u> way in which we can express our love for them**."

Paul: A man of prayer

"Paul's praying and his commands and the urgency with which he pressed upon the church to pray, is the most convincing proof of the absolute necessity of prayer…To pray everywhere, to pray in everything, to continue instant in prayer, and to pray

without ceasing, thus Paul spoke as commentator on the divine uses and the nature of prayer" (E.M. Bounds, 545-546).

"How Paul did pray for those early Christians! They were in his mind and on his heart, and he was continually at it" (p. 559).

Review the following passages that record Paul's prayers for the church. What do you notice about his prayers?

1 Corinthians 1:4-9

Ephesians 1:15-23

Ephesians 3:14-21

Philippians 1:3-11

Colossians 1:3-14

2 Thessalonians 1:3-4

Approaching the Throne of Grace

Hebrews 4:14-16
"Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

We have this incredible privilege to enter the holy of holies (throne of grace) at any time from anywhere. This privilege is made accessible to us because Jesus is our great high priest, who through His death and resurrection has opened the way for us. We have confidence to approach the throne of grace, not in ourselves, but in the blood of Christ alone, by a new and living way (Heb 10:19-20). Calvin states, "All we do is polluted; we cannot go into the presence of God alone; we must either go in the hand of a Mediator or our hearts and our hopes will fail us. He is our Advocate."

"It was before the earthly mercy-seat that the work of propitiation was completed in token on the day of atonement and the grace of God extended to His people; the presence of the Christians' high priest on the heavenly throne of grace bespeaks a work of propitiation completed not in token but in fact, and the constant availability of divine aid in all their need. Thanks to Him, the throne of God is a mercy-seat to which they have free access and from which they may receive all the grace and power required for timely help in the hour of trial and crisis" F.F. Bruce, 86-87).

Therefore, we dare not be prayer-less for others who are in desperate need of God's grace and help.

Equipping

Why is intercession the most powerful and practical way in which to express our love for one another (see Calvin's quote)?

***A Praying Life*: Keeping Track of the Story-Using Prayer Cards**
By Paul Miller (pp. 225-226)

Here are the overall guidelines I [Paul] use when creating a prayer card.

1. The card functions like a prayer snapshot of a person's life, so I use short phrases to describe what I want
2. When praying, I usually don't linger over a card for more than a few seconds. I just pick out one or two key areas and pray for them.
3. I put the Word to work by writing a Scripture verse on the card that expresses my desire for that particular person or situation.
4. The card doesn't change much. Maybe once a year I will add another line. There are just the ongoing areas in a person's life that I am praying for.
5. I usually don't write down answers. They are obvious to me since I see the card almost every day.
6. I will sometimes date a prayer request by putting the month/year as in 11/17.

Building a sample deck (*A Praying Life*, p. 232)

- Family cards for each person
- People-in-suffering cards (1-3)
- Friend card (1)
- Non-Christian card (1)
- Church leadership card (1)
- Small-group card (1)
- Missionary, ministries card (1)
- Work cards (3)
- Co-workers card (1)
- Repentance cards (3-5)
- Hope or big-dream cards (3-5)

Tracking God's Story in Others: Using Prayer Cards (Paul Miller, *A Praying Life*)

Building A Sample Deck: What are different categories of people in your life that you could include in your deck of prayer cards?

Items to include on your prayer cards:

Scripture

Specific prayer needs

Important areas of growth/mature

Accountability

Review your action points from the last lesson. What action points will you commit to in order to strengthen your prayer life in the next month?

Mission

V7PC Ministry Plan: Make Disciples

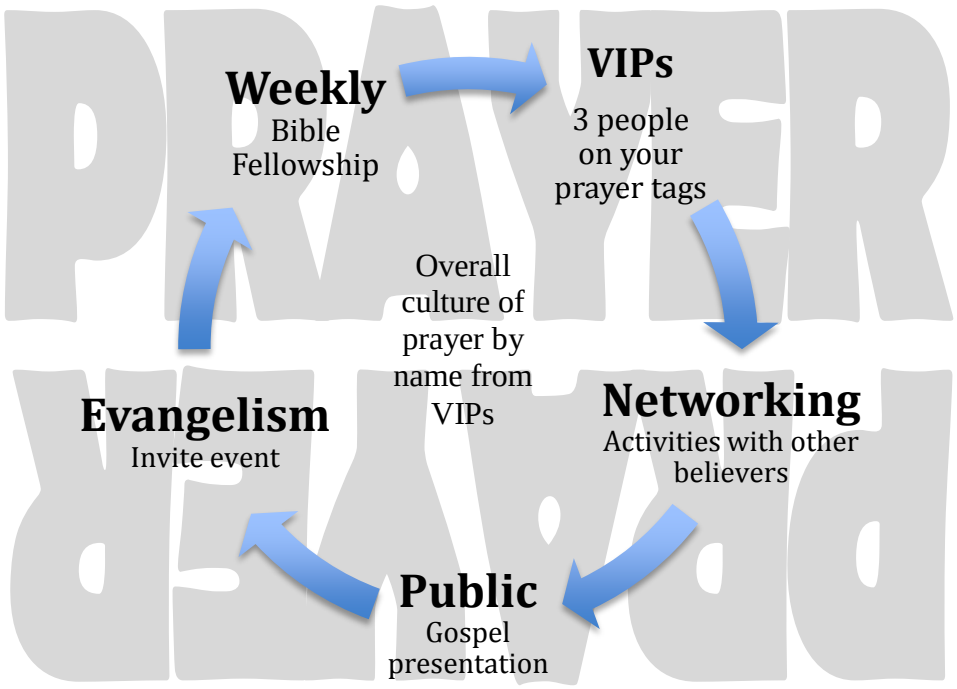
Strategy and Tactics

Note: A disciple is a follower of Christ. Therefore, to make disciples means to reach the lost and, by the Spirit's enablement, lead them from unbelief to belief.

1. Equip God's people to share the gospel in word and deed where they live, work, and play.
2. Proclaim the gospel to our community in both word and deed.
3. Create opportunities for our people to invest in and invite un-churched people to places where they can be exposed to God's Word and God's people.

The *Invest & Invite* training at V7PC incorporates the diagram below. It shows that 'prayer' is at the heart of reaching out and proclaiming the gospel where we live, work and play.

How can viewing those you are praying for as your VIPs (Very Important People) instead of non-Christians or 'us' vs. 'them' change how you pray for them?



Why is prayer the foundation of evangelism?

Who are the three people (non-church, non-believers) you are praying for? Complete a 'card' below for each one. Include Scripture, prayer needs, and plans for connecting with them.

Name: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Name: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Name: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Supplication

Share your prayer requests with one another. Space is provided below to write them down. Use this to help remind you what to pray for each other during the week. In addition there are a few questions to help you share requests.

Write out an index card for those in your group to pray for daily. Keep it up to date.

What are your prayer requests regarding the truth this week?

In light of the discussion this week what do you need to pray for?

What are your prayer requests regarding any situations in your life this week?

Prayer requests from others in the group this week

Slowing Down to Pray—Week 3

Truth

Much of this lesson comes from *An Unhurried Life* by Alan Fadling.

The Fast Pace of Life

Fadling suggests four reasons why we are so hurried (11-13)

1. We have been trained that the faster we go, the more we can get done.
2. Our culture values speed, efficiency and quickness. Waiting is bad. Getting what we want now is good.
3. We avoid boredom and when we hurry, we are not bored.
4. Technology and speed: The technologies that promised increased leisure time has actually accelerated our pace of life, making our lives fuller and giving us less downtime.

How would you describe your 'hurried' life? 1. The constant high RPMs of a car, or 2. the Roadrunner? Why?

The Unhurried Life of Jesus-Our Example

"I believe that modeling our life according to the unhurried pace of Jesus' life and ministry could be a healing and empowering vision for contemporary Christians" (11).

Read the following descriptions and notice the priority of prayer in the life of Jesus and how He intentionally slows down, then answer the following questions.

Mark 6:30-32 _____

Luke 4:22 _____

Luke 5:16 _____

Luke 6:12-13 _____

How often did Jesus seek solitude?

Where did Jesus go to pray?

With whom did He pray?

How long did He pray?

Alan Fadling remarks, “Jesus invited his followers, in the midst of a busy time of ministering, to withdraw—as he often did-to a quiet, restful place where they could spend time in communion with the Father.”

Henry Nouwen observes, “In the midst of a busy schedule of activities—healing people, casting out devils, responding to impatient disciples, traveling from town to town, and preaching from synagogue to synagogue-we find these quiet words: ‘In the morning, long before dawn, he got up and left the house and went off to a lonely place and prayed there.’ The more I read this nearly silent sentence locked in between the loud words of action, the more I have the sense that the secret to Jesus’ ministry is hidden in that lonely place where he went to pray…In the lonely place Jesus finds the courage to follow God’s will and not his own; to speak God’s words and not his own; to do God’s work and not his own. It is in the lonely place, where Jesus enters into intimacy with the Father, that his ministry is born” (*Spiritual Formation*, 20).

Read the story of Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42).

Respond to the following statement, “Martha’s worried words to Jesus exposed her hurried heart. Doing something good for him took precedence over listening to something good from him” (Fadling, 103). Are you a Martha or a Mary?

Equipping

Take a morning or afternoon together and go to a solitude place (e.g. Palmer Park) and spend an extended time in prayer. You can use the instructions provided by the Navigators. You are encouraged to set the time aside together for the accountability, plus you can share your insights with one another over a lunch or dinner. This activity takes planning and intentionality. So put it on the calendar today.

How to Spend Extended Time in Prayer

The idea of spending an extended time in prayer-a half day or more—can seem so difficult that we never do it. But the guidelines listed here can help you approach such a time with the right preparation and the right attitude, and to gain richly from the experience.

Five reasons

In *How to Spend a Day in Prayer,* Lorne Sanny give us these reasons for taking a break in our busy lives to spend a lengthy time alone with God.

1. For extended fellowship with God, beyond your morning devotions. It means just plain being with and thinking about God. God has called us into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:9). Like many personal relationships, this fellowship is nurtured by spending time together.

2. For renewed perspective. Like flying over the battlefield in a reconnaissance plane, a day of prayer gives opportunity to think of the world from God's point of view.

Especially when going through some difficulty, we need this perspective to sharpen our vision of the unseen, and to let the immediate, tangible things drop into proper place. Our spiritual defenses are strengthened while we "fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For . . . what is unseen is eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18).

3. For catching up on intercession. There are non-Christian friends and relatives to bring before the Lord, missionaries on various fields, our pastors, our neighbors, our government leaders—to name a few.

Influencing people and changing events through prayer is well-known among Christians but too little practiced. And as the times become more serious around us, we need to reconsider the value of personal prayer, both to accomplish and deter.

4. For prayerful consideration of our lives before the Lord—personal inventory and evaluation. You will especially want to take a day of prayer when facing important decisions, as well as on a periodic basis. On such a day, you can evaluate where you are in relation to your goals, and get direction from the Lord through His Word.

5. For adequate preparation. If God has given us plans and purposes in these times alone, we will be ready when opportunity comes to move right into it. We won't have to say, "I'm not prepared." The reason many Christians are dead to opportunities is not because they are not mentally alert, but they are simply unprepared in heart. Preparation is made when we get alone with God.

Scheduling your time
Divide the time into three parts:

1. Wait on the Lord—to realize His presence, to be cleansed, and to worship Him.
2. Pray for others. Ask specific things for them. Use Paul's prayers in the New Testament to pray for them, and pray for them what you are praying for yourself.
3. Pray for yourself. Be totally honest with God, and yet not too introspective. (In many cases, a person will do better to pray for himself before praying for others.) As Lorne Sanny said, "You will end the day worse than you started if all you do is think of yourself and your own problems."

Making a worry list
While you need to heed Sanny's warning about spending the whole day absorbed in your own problems, you may find it helpful to follow the steps below in making a "worry list." This will help you pray more effectively for yourself.

1. Give some thought to current conflicts, problems, concerns, or frustrations, and write them down and number them. List anything that is "bugging" you. No matter how small an item is, if it is of concern to you, list it.
2. Every worry you have in the world should be on that piece of paper—it is all there! When you are satisfied that this is so, go on to step three. (It is not uncommon for a person to have 20 or more items.)
3. Go through the list item by item. On each item determine whether you can do nothing about it because it is beyond your control, or whether you can do something to resolve it.

Whatever your conclusion, pray about each issue. But if you feel you can take action about it, write down what you plan to do. (You will probably find many other things to add to this "do list" throughout your time of prayer.)

What to take with you
The essential items to have with you are a Bible, paper, and a pen or pencil. Other helpful items include:

A clock or watch
Prayer letters from missionaries and other Christian workers
A favorite devotional book
Your current prayer list
Your quiet time journal
A hymnal Scripture memory cards
Notes from your last extended time in prayer
Your family or personal budget
A bag lunch and beverage
A calendar

How to stay awake and alert

1. Get adequate rest the two nights before.
2. Change positions-sit a while, walk around, sit, walk, and so on.
3. Have variety in what you do. Read the Scriptures, then prayer, then write, and so on.
4. Pray aloud—in a whisper or soft voice if necessary.

Taking notes
Taking notes during your extended time in prayer will give you a record of the things the Lord is speaking to you about, and also help you keep your time organized.

In addition, when we pray we often have something come to mind that we feel we should take action on, or that we have forgotten to do—perhaps totally unrelated to what we are praying about. By keeping paper ready to list these things so we can act on them later, we can avoid prolonged distraction.

Toward the end of your time in prayer you will want to spend fifteen minutes or so writing down some conclusions. Summarize the major impressions of your time.

Keep these notes in a notebook and review them weekly for a while. This will ensure that you follow through on the things God has impressed on you.

"God bless you as you do this—and do it soon!"

This article appeared in the October 1979 issue of *Navlog*. It was adapted from *The 2:7 Series -- Navigator Discipleship Training for Church Laymen*.
https://www.navigators.org/resource/spend-extended-time-prayer/

Set aside 2-3 hours for an extended time of prayer with the Lord.

Accountability

Review your action points from the last lesson. What action points will you commit to in order to strengthen your prayer life in the next month?

When will you schedule an extended time of prayer?

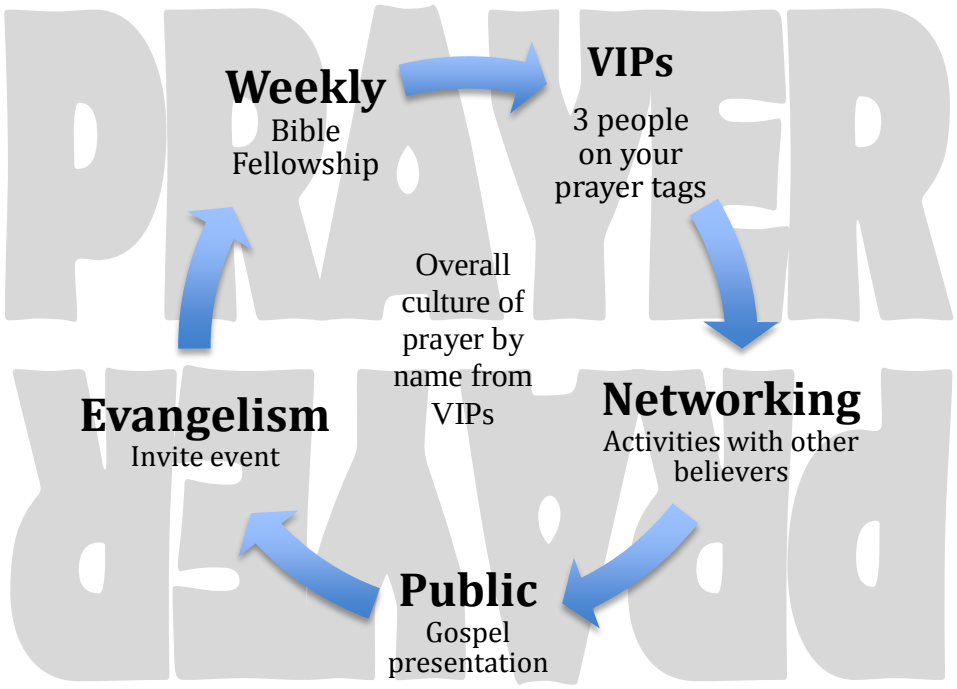
Mission

The *Invest & Invite* training at V7PC incorporates the diagram below. It shows that 'prayer' is at the heart of reaching out and proclaiming the gospel where we live, work and play.

How can viewing those you are praying for as your VIPs (Very Important People) instead of non-Christians or 'us' vs. 'them' change how you pray for them?

How can you use your extended time of prayer to deepen your relationship with your VIPs and give you insight for proclaiming and living out the gospel with them?

Where do you see each of your VIPs on this diagram? Explain.



Supplication

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Write out an index card for those in your group to pray for daily. Keep it up to date.

What are your prayer requests regarding the truth this week?

In light of the discussion this week what do you need to pray for?

What are your prayer requests regarding any situations in your life this week?

Prayer requests from others in the group this week

<u>Prayer Week - 4</u>

Truth

Listen to the sermon *Seeking Grace in Prayer* by Mark Bates and take notes here on the main points of the sermon.

I. God Our Father

II. Seek His Kingdom

III. Practicing Prayer

Equipping

After listening to the sermon think through or answer these questions to be discussed during your time together.

What are the negative motivations described in the sermon?

What is the goal for praying suggested in the sermon?

How does praying *"Our Father in heaven, hallowed is your name*" reflect our dependency upon God?

How does praying God's Kingdom come shape your prayers?

How can creation, fall, redemption and glory change the way we pray?

When will you commit to pray in your day (schedule your appointment with God your Father)?

Challenge: During the next month, use the following outline during your times of prayer.

Talking to God in prayer…

1. God's Honor – acknowledge his worth, glory, and majesty
"Our Father in heaven, hallowed is your name."

2. God's Kingdom – acknowledge His priority in the world and your life
"Your kingdom come, your will be done."

3. God's Provision – acknowledge his trustworthiness
"Give us this day our daily bread."

4. God's Forgiveness – acknowledge his forgiveness & your repentance
"Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors."

5. God's Power – acknowledge your dependence
"Deliver us from the evil one so we may not be led into temptation."

Accountability

Before your time together, think about the questions below. You might be asked any of these questions and you may be asking them of one another during your time together. These questions will help you to examine your life in light of the truth you explored this week and allow each of you an opportunity to encourage each other.

- What about your prayer life have you been struggling with that you need repent of?

- In what areas of your prayer life do you need to believe?

- How are you going to fight in your prayer life?

Mission

Who are the three people (non-church, non-believers) for whom you are praying?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Steps I have taken or will take to connect with them:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

How can this lesson fuel your prayer for those on your prayer-tags?

Think about this—unless they become children of God through faith in Christ and the renewing work of the Spirit, they cannot call God their Father (John 1:12; Gal 3:26) and do not have the privilege to draw near to God (Heb 4:14-16).

Supplication

Share your prayer requests with one another. Space is provided below to write them down. Use this to help remind you what to pray for each other during the week.

In addition, there are a few questions to help you share requests.

What are your prayer requests regarding the truth this week?

In light of the discussion this week what do you need to pray for?

What are your prayer requests regarding any situations in your life this week?

Prayer requests from others in the group this week